



OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

August 12, 2003

Mr. J. Kevin Patteson
Assistant General Counsel
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711

OR2003-5600

Dear Mr. Patteson:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 185832.

The Office of the Governor (the "governor") received a request for information concerning "express advocacy" and meetings in which "express advocacy" was discussed. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.106(b), 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that the submitted information includes a two-page document that is not responsive to any aspect of the request for information. This ruling does not address this two-page document, and the governor need not release it. We have marked this document accordingly.

Because your section 552.111 claim is the broadest, we address it first. Section 552.111 excepts from public disclosure "an interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency." The purpose of this exception is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San Antonio*, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.--San Antonio 1982, no writ); Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2 (1990). In Open Records Decision No. 615 (1993), this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992,

no writ). We determined that section 552.111 excepts only those internal communications that consist of advice, recommendations, opinions, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 5. A governmental body's policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. The Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351 (Tex. 2000) (Gov't Code § 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions do include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body's policy mission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995). Further, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events that are severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 5. If, however, the factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, the factual information may also be withheld under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

This office also has concluded that a preliminary draft of a document that is intended for public release in its final form necessarily represents the drafter's advice, opinion, and recommendation with regard to the form and content of the final document, so as to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 559 at 2 (1990) (applying statutory predecessor). Section 552.111 protects factual information in the draft that also will be included in the final version of the document. *See id.* at 2-3. Thus, section 552.111 encompasses the entire contents, including comments, underlining, deletions, and proofreading marks, of a preliminary draft of a policymaking document that will be released to the public in its final form. *See id.* at 2.

When determining if an interagency memorandum is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111, we must consider whether the agencies between which the memorandum is passed share a privity of interest or common deliberative process with regard to the policy matter at issue. *See* Open Records Decision No. 561 at 9 (1990). Section 552.111 applies not only to a governmental body's internal memoranda, but also to memoranda prepared for a governmental body by its outside consultant. Open Records Decision Nos. 462 at 14 (1987), 298 at 2 (1981).

The submitted documents consist of e-mail and drafts of proposed legislation. You assert that "the staff of the Office of the Governor and other state agencies advise the Governor in his policy formulation, and thus their pre-decisional communications are clearly within the purposes of [section 552.111]." We agree that some of the information in the submitted documents is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111, and we have marked this information accordingly. However, some of the information at issue was received from or provided to two outside parties, and you have not demonstrated that the two outside parties

shared a privity of interest or common deliberative process with the governor regarding the governor's policy position on the proposed legislation. Furthermore, you have not demonstrated that these two outside parties can be considered consultants for purposes of section 552.111. Therefore, information received from or provided to the two outside parties is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.111. It is also unclear who authored and had access to several of the submitted documents. You have not demonstrated that section 552.111 applies to these documents. Additionally, the purely factual information in the submitted documents is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.111.

Next, we consider whether the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.106(b). Section 552.106 excepts from disclosure "[a] draft or working paper involved in the preparation of proposed legislation" and "[a]n internal bill analysis or working paper prepared by the governor's office for the purpose of evaluating proposed legislation." We note that sections 552.111 and 552.106 are similar in that they both protect advice, opinion, and recommendation on policy matters in order to encourage frank discussion during the policymaking process. Open Records Decision No. 460 at 3 (1987). However, section 552.106 is narrower than section 552.111 in that it applies specifically to the legislative process. *Id.* Section 552.106 ordinarily applies only to persons with a responsibility to prepare information and proposals for a legislative body. *Id.* at 1. The purpose of section 552.106 is to encourage frank discussion on policy matters between the subordinates or advisors of a legislative body and the members of the legislative body, and therefore, it does not except from disclosure purely factual information. *Id.* at 2.

The remaining information consists of information received from or provided to two outside parties, the documents whose authorship has not been established, and severable factual information. Section 552.106 does not except from disclosure the information received from or provided to the two outside parties or the documents whose authorship has not been established, because you have not demonstrated that these individuals had a responsibility to prepare information and proposals for the governor. Furthermore, the protection of section 552.106 does not extend to purely factual information. Therefore, we conclude that none of the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.106.

Finally, we consider whether the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107. Section 552.107(1) protects information that comes within the attorney-client privilege. When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body has the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to withhold the information at issue. *See* Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate that the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made "for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services" to the client governmental body. *See* TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). The privilege does not apply when an attorney or representative is involved in some capacity other than that of providing or facilitating professional legal services to the client governmental body. *See In re Texas*

Farmers Ins. Exch., 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney acting in capacity other than that of attorney). Governmental attorneys often act in capacities other than that of professional legal counsel, such as administrators, investigators, or managers. Thus, the mere fact that a communication involves an attorney for the government does not demonstrate this element. Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. *See* TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1)(A), (B), (C), (D), (E). Thus, a governmental body must inform this office of the identities and capacities of the individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made. Lastly, the attorney-client privilege applies only to a *confidential* communication, *id.* 503(b)(1), meaning it was “not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication.” *Id.* 503(a)(5).

Whether a communication meets this definition depends on the *intent* of the parties involved at the time the information was communicated. *See Osborne v. Johnson*, 954 S.W.2d 180, 184 (Tex. App.—Waco 1997, no writ). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain that the confidentiality of a communication has been maintained. Section 552.107(1) generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege unless otherwise waived by the governmental body. *See Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein).

You inform us that the information at issue consists of “legal advice and opinion given to various members of the Office of the Governor by members of the General Counsel division.” You explain that “[t]he documents reveal confidential communications and were in furtherance of rendering professional legal services to a governmental body.” You also indicate that “[t]he documents were never intended for individuals outside the Office of the Governor, nor were they distributed to anyone other than those indicated.” Based on these representations, we conclude that some of the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107, and we have marked this information accordingly. However, the remaining information includes communications with individuals who are not employed by the governor’s office. You have not explained how these individuals can be considered clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. Therefore, we conclude that communications involving these individuals are not excepted from disclosure under section 552.107. You also have not demonstrated how section 552.107 applies to the documents whose authorship has not been established, and this information may not be withheld under section 552.107.

In summary, a two-page document submitted to this office is not responsive to the request for information and is not addressed in this ruling. We have marked information that is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107 and 552.111. The remaining information must be released.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).


If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code

§ 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,


Karen Hattaway
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KEH/sdk

Ref: ID# 185832

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Cris Feldman
Ivy, Crews & Elliot, P.C.
4601 Spicewood Springs Road
Building 3, Suite 200
Austin, Texas 78759
(w/o enclosures)